

The State Of Things

By Val Hymes



The big act was on the stage in courtroom 2 in Upper Marlboro. But the action in the wings at the Arthur Bremer trial was at times more dramatic.

Ten threatening telephone calls were received during the trial. One of them mentioned hostages, leading Sheriff Don Ansell to send the families of some members of his office out of town to prevent them being used to get at Bremer.

Dynamite was feared from a tip that was received, although no bomb threats came in. But Sheriff Ansell kept the courtroom area sealed off in such a way that it would not have to be evacuated for a bomb search.

Five hundred persons were searched and metal-scanned each day and 12 were ejected from the courtroom "because they looked like bums" or gave false information on the daily registration that was immediately checked as newsmen and spectators entered. Even pocket knives were checked at the door. Every floor was searched twice an hour; bags and briefcases were searched at outside doors, patrols circled endlessly.

Bremer's location was the best kept secret after he was moved to the court house from the jail for the trial. When the clamp of silence was lifted, we learned Bremer had been playing chess and watching television during recesses a few feet from the courtroom in the lock-up in the Sheriff's Office. "He's not a very good player," said one of his guards.

While he was in the Prince George's County Jail, he was kept in a cell lined with quarter-inch steel plates, the light bulb and window protected by plexiglass to prevent Bremer from hurting himself. He ate with plastic spoons from paper plates.

Every day, 1700 cartons of milk were examined, as was every loaf of bread that came to the jail. And Bremer was watched 24 hours a day by four rotating deputy sheriffs — one has a black belt in Karate — who played chess and watched television with him.

Today, Arthur Bremer, deemed sane and guilty of nine charges, is in a cell in the hospital annex of the Maryland Penitentiary. He is without television, chess or playing partners in a cell with an electrically-operated door so he cannot get to the officer watching

him and nobody can get near him.

On the way to the State's oldest, riot-prone prison, Bremer sat on the floor of the police van with a dejected look on his face.

"I'm really in trouble now," he said. And when he was left sitting on a bench inside the Penitentiary, a prison guard told Sheriff Ansell Bremer finally cried, the first sign of emotion he had shown other than his perpetual grin.

He will be eligible for parole when a quarter of his sentence has been served — 15 years and nine months. But he can also get 10 days for good behavior for each month shaved from his 63 years. He could be out of jail in 1987, when he is 36 years old, the way it looks now, if the Parole Board is willing.

An appeal to the Maryland Court of Special Appeals is expected, but there is no money for it. Defense attorney Benjamin Lipsitz was appointed by the federal court to represent Bremer but in the State trial, if Bremer had been declared an indigent, he would have been defended by the Public Defender's Office. Bremer asked him to defend him in Maryland.

Lipsitz, who told the jury, "All he's got is me, and that's something, but maybe not enough," indicated that he would not only ask for a new trial within the three-day deadline, but would appeal before the 30-day limit was over, even if he had to pay for the cost of a transcript out of his own pocket. With the 114-page diary, chronical of an odyssey to kill, first President Nixon, then George Wallace, and maybe even George McGovern, that could exceed \$2,000.

The Arthur Bremer trial had an emotional impact on Maryland,

on Prince George's County, on those who heard about the tortured life of the young man with the easy pen and arrogant, gruesome plans for recognition.

"I am the biggest thing that has happened to Prince George's County since the Civil War," he told his guards on the way to the Penitentiary. "I am the news. The news follows me."

His trial was the "big trial" he had predicted to his parents, complete with the networks, 61 accredited reporters who watched his every move, and 100 law enforcement officers protecting him. "Please come to my trial," he begged his mother.

But the mother he hated and loved (as he hated and loved the political figures he wanted to kill) did not come to his "big trial." Neither did the girl friend answer her Maryland summons in Wisconsin, nor was he able to kill George Wallace.

Even his hopes to sell his diary for \$100,000 dimmed as reporters bought copies for \$5.20 and his attorney read every word into the record. State's Attorney Arthur A. Marshall called him a "second-rate assassin" and the jury voted him sane and guilty on the first ballot, without one argument.

The fact that no jury in Prince George's County has acquitted on insanity in the last dozen years or more may have something to do

with it, but Arthur Bremer would have been surprised at an acquittal — and possibly disappointed.

He called his Baltimore County jail cell "the happiest home I ever had," and wrote that he could have been "relaxing in a cell" if his assassination plans had not failed. "He was 'programmed for failure,'" said his attorney. "He is sick, but he knew what he was doing. He could conform if he wanted to," said Prosecutor Marshall.

The questions will go on. The drama is not ended on Maryland's stage. Is he insane or a cold-blooded fiend? Will Maryland help him or make him worse?

Arthur Bremer wrote on May 4, after deciding to stalk Wallace:

"Like a novelist who knows not how his book will end — I have written this journal — what a shocking surprise that my inner character shall steal the climax and destroy the author and save the anti-hero from assassination!!"

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Val Hymes, author of *The State of Things*, is on vacation. Her column will resume Aug. 24 as she covers the Republican National Convention.